DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 975 CS 212 725

AUTHOR Cianciolo, Patricia
TITLE Teaching Children To Respond Critically/Aesthetically to Picture Books as Literature. Elementary Subjects Center Series No. 34.
INSTITUTION Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects, East Lansing, MI.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Feb 91
CONTRACT G0098C0226
NOTE 28p.
AVAILABLE FROM Institute for Research on Teaching, College of Education, Michigan State University, 252 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034 ($3.00).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aesthetic Education; *Childrens Literature; *Critical Reading; Educational Research; Elementary Education; Grade 1; Grade 5; Literary Genres; *Literature Appreciation; *Picture Books; Reader Response; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Picture Stories

ABSTRACT

In an effort to effect significant change in teachers' knowledge understanding, and choice of instructional strategies for guiding the study of literature as art, a study explored the teaching and learning of critical/aesthetic response to literature among elementary school children. Subjects, 25 first graders and 39 fifth graders, were evaluated for critical/aesthetic responses to specific aspects of picture books as literature through pretest and posttest interviews and classroom observations. Conferences with teachers were also held. Results indicated that, to the extent allowed by such factors as students' maturity, their previous experience with literature, and the particular point in the study, both groups seemed to recognize the basic concepts of picture books as a genre. The first graders' responses suggested that they noticed obvious differences in art styles and techniques used by different illustrators whose books were read to them, as well as the obvious characteristics of modern realistic fiction. The fifth graders made evaluative statements which parallel some specific criteria typically used by literary critics to evaluate picture books as a genre, retellings of folk tales and legends, or literature in general. (Nineteen references are included.) (TD)

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Elementary Subjects Center
Series No. 34

TEACHING CHILDREN TO RESPOND CRITICALLY/ AESTHETICALLY TO PICTURE BOOKS AS LITERATURE

Patricia Cianciolo

Center for the
Learning and Teaching
of Elementary Subjects

Institute for
Research on Teaching
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Published by

The Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects
Institute for Research on Teaching
252 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034

February 1991

This work is sponsored in part by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects, Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University. The Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects is funded primarily by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position, policy, or endorsement of the Office or Department (Cooperative Agreement No. G0098C0226).

Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects

The **Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects** was awarded to Michigan State University in 1987 after a nationwide competition. Funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, the Elementary Subjects Center is a major project housed in the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT). The program focuses on conceptual understanding, higher order thinking, and problem solving in elementary school teaching of mathematics, science, social studies, literature, and the arts. Center researchers are identifying exemplary curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in the teaching of these school subjects; studying these practices to build new hypotheses about how the effectiveness of elementary schools can be improved; testing these hypotheses through school-based research; and making specific recommendations for the improvement of school policies, instructional materials, assessment procedures, and teaching practices. Research questions include, What content should be taught when teaching these subjects for understanding and use of knowledge? How do teachers concentrate their teaching to use their limited resources best? and In what ways is good teaching subject matter- specific?

The work is designed to unfold in three phases, beginning with literature review and interview studies designed to elicit and synthesize the points of view of various stakeholders (representatives of the underlying academic disciplines, intellectual leaders and organizations concerned with curriculum and instruction in school subjects, classroom teachers, state- and district-level policymakers) concerning ideal curriculum, instruction, and evaluation practices in these five content areas at the elementary level. Phase II involves interview and observation methods designed to describe current practice, and in particular, best practice as observed in the classrooms of teachers believed to be outstanding. Phase II also involves analysis of curricula (both widely used curriculum series and distinctive curricula developed with special emphasis on conceptual understanding and higher order applications), as another approach to gathering information about current practices. In Phase III, models of ideal practice will be developed, based on what has been learned and synthesized from the first two phases, and will be tested through classroom intervention studies.

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Abstract

This paper describes and analyzes two groups of elementary school students' critical/aesthetic responses to specific aspects of picture books as literature: 25 first graders identify the characteristics of modern realistic fiction in two picture books; 39 fifth graders evaluate Paul Goble's retellings of the Great Plains Indians folk tales and legends. In a yearlong intervention study, the goal was to teach these students to respond critically/aesthetically to literature and to make them aware of some of the specific characteristics of literature established by tradition to interpret and evaluate various selections.

To the extent allowed by such factors as students' maturity, their previous experiences with literature, and the particular point in the study, both groups seemed to recognize the basic concepts of picture books as a genre. The first graders' responses suggested that they noticed obvious differences in art styles and techniques used by different illustrators whose books were read to them as well as the obvious characteristics of modern realistic fiction. They were unable to identify subtle differences in forms, techniques, and styles evident in the authors' use of language or the illustrators' use of line, shape, or certain media. Often they were aware of their own point of view only; liking a story was identical with judging it.

The fifth graders made evaluative statements which parallel some specific criteria typically used by literary critics to evaluate picture books as a genre, retellings of folk tales and legends, or literature in general. Their judgments appeared guided by personal opinion. They looked at Goble's stories and illustrations for the quality of the experience they produced and were fascinated with his creativity and originality.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO RESPOND CRITICALLY/AESTHETICALLY TO PICTURE BOOKS AS LITERATURE[1]

Patricia J. Cianciolo[2]

This paper describes a study which explores the teaching and learning of critical/aesthetic response to literature and the responses of first graders and fifth graders to picture books as literary art. The major thrust of the study is to effect significant change in the teachers' knowledge, understanding, and choice of instructional strategies for guiding the study of literature as art, leading to comparable changes in elementary school students' knowledge and understanding about literature that will enable them to respond to it critically/aesthetically. This improvement-oriented study was designed in response to the request of 14 kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers in an elementary school in central Michigan to explore the teaching and learning of critical/aesthetic response to the literature studied and used in their curriculum.

As project coordinator I met with all of the teachers involved in this study in seminar/study group sessions since the beginning of the 1990-1991 academic year. During the two-hour, twice-monthly meetings, we examined aspects of theory and practice pertaining to some crucial issues that affect their study of literature. Some of these issues are the nature of literature (especially literature as an art), the content of an ideal elementary literature program, assessment procedures, the nature of critical thinking, the critical reading of literature, and response (especially aesthetic) to

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[1]Funding for this study is shared by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects and the Michigan Partnership for New Education.

[2]Patricia J. Cianciolo, professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, is a senior researcher with the Center.

literature. To document progress and change in knowledge, beliefs, and understanding about literature as an art, especially critical/aesthetic response to literature, I conducted pretest and posttest interviews, classroom observations, as well as conferences with individual teachers and the teachers in grade-level team meetings periodically since the beginning of the academic year. I am also preparing case studies on the teachers participating in the study as well as on selected students in each classroom. More specifically, seven teachers (one teacher of each grade level and one special education teacher) plus selected students (three students in each of the classroom who are designated by their teachers as being about average in reading achievement and having a high, medium, and low interest in reading literature) are being studied in considerable depth and breadth. The other seven teachers and selected students are also being studied, but not at the same depth and breadth as the group described above.

Bringing Literature into the Classroom

The practice of bringing literature into elementary classrooms seems to be increasing throughout most of the United States. Usually this literature takes the form of complete, individual picture books and novels, instead of portions or adaptations of literary selections, and/or occasionally the complete text of short selections collected and included in the volumes that comprise the reading (basal readers), language arts, and/or literature textbooks.

A number of potential benefits result from the practice of using individual and complete literary selections. One is that it allows students more opportunities to respond to the aesthetic elements of literature: to develop the capacity to respond to the uniqueness, the singular quality of each literature selection, and thus learn to value the individual integrity of an accomplished piece of literature and to reject the cliché (Ross, 1981). When they

have had numerous opportunities to read and study complete individual literary selections, children are likely to acquire important expectations and sensitivities about literature even though they may not be able to verbalize these responses to and knowledge about literature. Thus, they are more likely to recognize the characteristics that make it the kind (genre) of literature it is or its literary elements and construction. As a result of acquiring this familiarity with literature, children may become more inclined to recognize and use the criteria for judging and evaluating literature and develop a personal taste or preference for literature.

Additional potential benefits offered by quality literature include broadening the reader's background, exemplifying standard English, demonstrating the possibilities of language, facilitating the development of imaginative and creative thinking powers, and fostering an understanding and appreciation of one's cultural heritage and the cultural heritage of others (Cianciolo, 1987). These desirable results are likely to be realized <u>if</u> (I emphasize <u>if</u>) the kinds of questions, topics for discussion, and skills that are included in the study and use of literature take the reader's attention <u>into</u> the literature itself, <u>if</u> attention is given to the aesthetic aspects of literature (Cianciolo, 1988; Cianciolo & Prawat, 1990; Cianciolo & VanCamp, 1991; Parsons, 1989).

Elementary school students in kindergarten through Grade 5 are quite capable of learning how to respond critically/aesthetically to literature. It is crucial, however, that at no time should this focus on response be carried out to the point that children are allowed to lose their enthusiasm and joy for the literature they choose to read on their own or that which is read to them. At no point should their response to literature be manipulated or imposed on them. Some direct instruction about the structure or elements of a

story, the characteristics of each literary genre, or the structure or elements of the illustrations has a place in teaching critical/aesthetic response to literature in the elementary grades. Even the focus on evaluating how some of these aspects of literature have been developed in a story rightfully belongs in an elementary school literature program. But, none of this should precede or restrict the reading of a selection for the kind of literary experience or response each child is capable of and inclined to make on his/her own (Cianciolo, 1988).

Aesthetic Sensitivities and Understandings

Whether it is in the form of a story (such as a picture book or novel) or a poem, drama, or literary biography, literature is an art composed of images created by an effective use of words; a picture book is a form of literature in which the images are depicted through the effective use of language, whether expressed through the use of words or words and pictures. Whatever its form, the domain of literature is the realm of human experience. In creating a work of literary art the writer and/or the book illustrator develop(s) the artistic elements and make(s) use of techniques with conscious skill and imagination to depict images that amount to a selective interpretation of reality (aspects of the human experience). The result of this selective interpretation is an allusion to reality rather than a miniature or mirror image of reality.

To better understand what I am saying here, imagine yourself in a home looking out of windows that vary in shape, placement, and angle, yet each overlooks the same garden. Each window offers a different view of that garden, because the view is determined by the shape, placement, and angle of a particular window. Thus it is with the author and the illustrator. Whether they tell a story through words and/or pictures, artists must decide by

selective interpretation what aspects of the human experience to depict in that story.

These are the broad goals identified cooperatively by the author and the faculty in the study to develop aesthetic sensitivities to literature:

To increase understanding of literature's relationship to human experience

To develop an understanding of literary forms, techniques, and styles

To develop an awareness of the relationship between literature and other subject areas

To demonstrate the unique artistry of individual authors and illustrators

To gain an appreciation for the literary heritage that is a legacy from one generation to another and from one culture to another

When teaching critical thinking about literature, it is crucial to recognize the value and inevitability of both cognitive and affective responses to literature. Both are inherent in critical/aesthetic response and should be encouraged in any literature program, especially one focusing on critical thinking about literature.

During the preliminary reading of a literary selection, children and adults tend first of all to read for the story, for what happens next. The same occurs when reading some informational articles or essays--or watching films or drama, for these, too, are forms of literary art. Whatever form the literature takes, readers or viewers of films or drama tend to react to the pace, mood, and the personalities, actions, and interactions of the characters before they can concentrate on being analytical and evaluative in their reading and become aware of the author's theme(s) or argument(s), tone, or style. It is during the second reading, or at least after they have read a good portion of a selection, know the story, and have experienced the impact of the interrelationship of the literary elements, that they can engage in

critical thinking and evaluate it as literary art. The same principle applies when critiquing a film or drama, for these too are forms of literary art.

The background of experiences readers have had with literature tends to influence how they compare one story with another and how they compare and contrast new works by an author with his/her older works. In addition, readers need knowledge about literature in and of itself: elements of fiction (plot, characterization, setting, theme, mood, voice, tone, and style), the characteristics and structure of the various literary genres (historical fiction, traditional literature, modern fantasy, contemporary realistic fiction, literary biography, etc.), plus some knowledge and guidance about how to use techniques in critical thinking. During the second reading or when reflecting on what was read, readers can decide what they liked or disliked about a particular work, and why, and define the qualities that either led them into the story or turned them away from it. At this point children can consider, in age-appropriate terms, aspects of character portrayal, style, tone, voice, the point or theme of the story, the effectiveness of the illustrations in an illustrated book or picture book, and so on. Also, at this point students can be asked questions about the reading they have done in order to develop various kinds of critical thinking abilities. Questions should not be asked prior to their first encounter with the story or while reading it to them. In each case, the story should be read, first and foremost, for the pleasure it may the potentially offers each student.

The Response of Students in the Study

Two groups of students--first graders and fifth graders--were taught to respond to literature as an art form, especially to the craft and techniques employed by the authors and the illustrators of picture books. Remember, regardless of the grade level or age of the children, they participated

in these discussions and activities **after** they had listened to or read the books.

First Graders' Responses

The lesson with the first graders (25 children, two of whom are mainstreamed special education students) was taught by their regular teacher and the lesson with the fifth graders was taught by me. The specific purposes and procedures of each lesson are described below, as are some of the results of these lessons in light of the children's responses. The goals of the lesson with the group of first graders were

> Offer them pleasant and satisfying literature experiences
>
> Increase their understanding of literature as an artistic interpretation and reaction to the human experience
>
> Recognize some of characteristics of one common form of literature, namely modern realistic fiction, as depicted in picture books

The characteristics included the following:

> The term modern (contemporary) realistic fiction infers that everything in the story, including the characters, setting, and plot as depicted in the words and in the illustrations could happen to real people living today
>
> Realistic fiction does not mean that the story is true; it only means that it could have happened to someone today

The first graders listened with obvious delight as their teacher showed them the animated, realistic line and full-color wash pictures and read aloud Shirley Hughes's upbeat "here-and-now" story Alfie's Feet (Hughes, 1982). All eyes were on the pictures and they listened with rapt attention to every word; their uninhibited responses to this thoroughly credible story demonstrated their delight with it: They giggled when Alfie counted his little sister's toes as he sang and played the game "This Little Pig Went to Market." Their facial expressions and their comments revealed that they were obviously shocked but humored when Alfie stamped about in the mud and walked through the

puddles left after a recent rainfall. Their comments expressing dismay seemed to match those in the pictures of Alfie when he discovered his shoes, socks, and feet had become soaked.

There was no question that Alfie's mother made the right decision to buy him a pair of shiny yellow boots in preparation for the next rainfall. In fact, their smiles suggested they were as pleased as Alfie obviously was with this purchase. They seemed to think that it was perfectly logical that the moment this young protagonist got back home he should unwrap his new boots, put them on by himself, and walk about the house in them. When they were shown, through words and pictures, that Alfie realized that they "felt funny," it did not take very long before one child after another noticed and smugly pointed out to their teacher and to their classmates that Alfie had put his new boots on the wrong feet.

They seemed quite pleased that Alfie discovered by himself what was wrong and relaxed with satisfied expressions when Alfie's father helped him take off each boot and put it on the correct foot. There was an absolute avalanche of comments when Alfie's mother painted a big black "R" on one of Alfie's boots and a big black "L" on the other to help him remember which boot to put on which foot. Any number of these first graders seemed to want to tell one another that their mother or father, older brother or sister, or their kindergarten teacher did the very same thing with their boots and even with their mittens.

The next day, following the reading of Alfie's Feet, the teacher asked them to "think" about what happened to Alfie in this story. (The children had already had lessons on picture book fiction.) To help them remember the story, she showed them the pictures, holding each page open long enough so they could examine the pictures and comment to one another about what was

happening in them if they wanted to. Then she asked them to tell one another what events in this story could happen and what could not. They were expected to explain why they thought these events were possible or not possible. At this stage in their development, their "proof" rested on their own experiences or those of others they observed or heard about. For example, some of them related stories about getting their shoes wet and muddy and what their parents said or did to them on these occasions. Some described how it felt to wear shoes or boots that were on the wrong feet.

When the teacher asked them if people actually talked or behaved as all of the characters in this story did and what made them think this was actually real or possible, there was no doubt in the students' minds that the author depicted such situations realistically. Here again they used their own actual or vicarious experiences to establish the realism or credibility of the characters' behavior. She then asked them to look at the illustrations to see if this story happened "now" or "long ago" and explain why they placed it in the time period they did.

To a person they said the story happened "now." To prove that they were correct, they confidently pointed to the clothes worn by Alfie, his sister, mother, father, or the people who were shopping. In addition, the students said that these people wore clothes and eyeglasses similar to those worn by members of their family. One child pointed to the earrings Alfie's mother wore, another child pointed to the automobile in the street scene, and another mentioned the toy telephone in one of the pictures. Then the teacher asked them if they could think of anything that happened in the story or if they noticed anything in the pictures that they thought "could never really happen." No one offered any examples. Then she asked them to look at the pictures again to determine if there was anything in the pictures which told

them that maybe this story happened a long time ago. They agreed that nothing in the pictures suggested this. On the basis of these criteria, the teacher told them that Alfie's Feet was a kind of story called "modern realistic fiction," a term this teacher had used numerous times previously when she read other picture books that were realistic stories set in contemporary times.

Several days later, the teacher read Eat Up, Gemma (Hayes, 1988) to these same first graders. Written by Sarah Hayes and illustrated by Jan Ormerod, this picture book offers a credible glimpse of the eating habits of Baby Gemma. She is depicted throwing her breakfast on the floor, squashing grapes, banging her spoon on the table, trying to eat the fake fruit from a woman's hat, and so on. As always, the teacher held the book open while she read the story to the children, so they were able to examine the pictures as the story was being read to them.

The children followed this story every minute and, as children are inclined to do while listening to a story, some of them blurted out uninhibitedly their thoughts and feelings about what was happening. Later the children had a wonderful time discussing Baby Gemma's antics, laughingly comparing them with those of their siblings or even themselves when they were babies. When the teacher asked them if they could remember what kind of story she said Alfie's Feet was, one boy responded proudly, "Modern realistic fiction! And this is modern realistic fiction, too!" "Now," said the teacher, "How do we know that Eat Up, Gemma is realistic fiction, too?" Just as they had done with Alfie's Feet, they were able to identify and explain how the characteristics of modern realistic fiction were reflected in Eat Up, Gemma.

The teacher asked them what they thought about each book. They had fun responding to this question as they recalled and chatted about specific incidents in each book which they liked. No one offered any negative comments

about either of the books. The reasons they gave for choosing specific aspects of each story as those which they liked especially were "because it was funny"; "because that's what happened to me"; and "because my sister likes to imitate me, too." None of the children indicated a preference for one story over another or one approach to illustrating over another.

The students could easily recognize the differences between some of the techniques and styles of art used by Shirley Hughes and Jan Ormerod. Three of the students were proud to point out to classmates seated near them that the illustrations in Alfie's Feet were "the same kinds of pictures" they remembered seeing in another story which the teacher read to them about Alfie, namely Alfie Gets in First (Hughes, 1981). They did notice obvious differences in art styles and techniques used by Hughes and Omerod as well as the obvious characteristics of literary forms, such as modern realistic fiction. They were still unable to identify subtle differences in forms, techniques, and styles evident in the authors' use of language or the illustrators' use of line, shape, or certain media. The children may have had a preference for one story in general over the other, but these preferences were not expressed.

What does this all mean as to where these first graders are developmentally in responding critically/aesthetically to literature? Although they have immense social potential, they have not yet become members of the literary society; they are at the beginning stage of critical/aesthetic response to literature. They are not yet able to take the perspectives of others and are usually unaware of how perspectives of others compare or differ with theirs. Often they are only aware of their own point of view. Aesthetically, literature is a vehicle for pleasant experiences. They liked Alfie's Feet and Eat Up, Gemma; therefore, they were good stories. To them, liking a story is identical with judging it; they were not objective.

Fifth Graders' Responses

A fifth-grade teacher asked me to use Paul Goble's picture books to teach a lesson to help her students (39 children, 7 of whom were mainstreamed special education students) recognize and evaluate the picture book as a specific kind of literature and to add more depth to their study about Native Americans from various U.S. regions, in this case the Plains Indians. She had already read two of Paul Goble's picture books to the students--The Gift of the Sacred Dog (Goble, 1980) and Ikotomi and the Berries (Goble, 1989); she asked me to read The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses (Goble, 1978a) and talk to them about the art in these books as well as in his others. More specifically she asked me to identify the media Goble used; explain how he incorporated some of the beliefs, attitudes, and designs of the Plains Indians in his work; and show how he established a sense of place in his pictures. The components of the lesson which I taught, some explanations as to why I focused on particular concepts and characteristics of picture books, and the fifth graders' responses to the lesson are described below.

The basic characteristics of picture books and the concept that the picture book is a specific kind of literature were highlighted in this lesson on the study of picture books as literature. The characteristics of the picture book which were stressed include the following:

> Picture story books contain numerous illustrations and develop a definite story line; the illustrations and the text are individual entities, but the story cannot be deduced merely by viewing the illustrations or reading the words.
>
> The relationship between illustrations and verbal portions that make up a picture book is that of a unique coexistence; each must relate to the other.
>
> -The illustrations complement and enhance the elements (components) of the fiction (setting, characterization, action, mood, theme, etc.) which were developed in the text.
>
> -Both text and illustrations avoid stereotypes (of race, gender, age, etc.).

-The author's and illustrator's style and the means for creative expression (words or pictures) are unique and of interest to children.

The story, developed through the combination of words and pictures, reflects talent and craftsmanship.

If the story is a folk tale or an original story written in the style and form of a folk tale and the illustrator wants to suggest the cultural aspects traditionally associated with that ethnic group, everything about the illustrations should suggest those groups' traditions.

In order to understand the concepts of the picture book as one kind of literature, it was necessary that the students be able to discern how the following aspects of literature as an art are incorporated in a picture book:

The unique artistry of an individual author/illustrator

The relationship of literature to the human experience

The relationship between literature and subject matter (especially cultural traditions and beliefs held by the Plains Indians)

The characteristics of literary forms (in this case, the picture book and folk tales) as well as the interrelationships of elements or components of fiction (characterization, setting, theme, mood, plot, and style

(It should be pointed out that these students had already understood a little about the concepts of literature as art in relation to novels and the elements of fiction before they were asked to consider them in relation to picture books.)

If children are going to learn how to evaluate book illustrations validly, it is important for them to know that book artists choose the particular medium (or combination of media) they are most comfortable with and believe they can use best to depict and extend those ideas, actions, feelings, and moods portrayed in the text which they choose to highlight. They must also know that the book artists choose to express these aspects of the story through a shape (style of art) that is unique, yet in keeping with the story.

It is not necessary, however, that they be able to identify the specific media used by the book artists, nor do they have to know the name of the specific techniques or art style employed by the artists.

I quickly determined that the children had at least some prior knowledge about the Plains Indians from reading and talking about The Gift of the Sacred Dog (Goble, 1980), Goble's picture book retelling the legend of the reaction of North American Indians of the Great Plains to seeing horses for the first time and their subsequent respect for them. Yet there was so much more information about the Plains Indians and Goble's art in particular which would help the students to understand and appreciate better the richness of these people's heritage. I also wanted them to recognize Goble's ability to incorporate his knowledge about and respect for their history and ethnicity in his illustrations. In addition, I wanted them to consider the quality of Goble's graphics in and of themselves. The greatest challenge for me was not to overstructure this lesson, overload the students with too many facts and considerations about this kind of literature or about the many aspects of the Plains Indians and their beliefs, nor impose my attitudes about this author/artist's work. Therefore, I tried to keep my presentation as informal as I could and encouraged them to ask questions or offer any remarks they felt would add to the deliberations.

During the course of this lesson (approximately 60 minutes) we discussed the following information about the Plains Indians and Goble's graphics, especially those in the 1979 Caldecott Medal Award book The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses (Goble, 1978a): The Plains Indians are also known as the Horse-back Indians because they told so many original stories about horses. The horse the girl is shown riding in Goble's award-winning picture book and the one she eventually grows to love is an Appaloosa stallion. The insects,

animals, flora, and fauna depicted throughout are typical of those found in South Dakota in the valley meadows where horses like to graze and where the Plains Indians lived.

The tepees are always pitched in a circle with an opening to the east, the direction of the first rays of the sun, "to warm the earth and also the hearts of men" (Goble, 1978b). Every tepee design is supposed to be a divine revelation through birds and animals, thunder or snow; in other words, nothing on them is mere decoration. The designs on the tepee consist of a bottom border which represents the earth, a top portion representing the sky, and animals in between. Animal designs in the middle area display the vital organs and leg joints because these are recognized as the sources of the animals' power. The cross-like shape at the top back of the lodge symbolizes the Morning Star--a wish for wisdom and good dreams. The discs at the top represent stars, with the Big Dipper often appearing on the smoke flaps. The bottom border, the earth, has projecting triangles or rounded figures representing hills and mountains. The stars are represented as circles at the top of the tepee; The Plains Indian believe that when a person dies his/her spirit walks along the Milky Way to the world above (Burland, 1985; Caraway, 1984; Goble, 1978b). It gives one "a sense of peace in the dark to know one has relatives in the sky" (Goble, 1978b).

We talked about Goble's use of color, that he used watercolor paint and ink to achieve bright colors and a flat appearance, and that he seemed to make no attempt at perspective and shading. These techniques were influenced by Indian hide and ledgerbook paintings as well as their bead and quill work (Goble, 1978b). I encouraged the children to notice his treatment of animals and birds: He portrays "their own characters more than their photographic

images, and special importance is attached to overall design" (Sunrise Publication, 1982).

He depicted the traditions of the Sioux and the Blackfeet but did not stereotype them; instead, he portrayed observable, individual qualities. Throughout the book, his illustrations seem to suggest a feeling of fondness and an attitude of profound respect for these people. The students were more than a little impressed with how much the layout varied from page to page, that each double-page spread seemed to be quite self-contained in and of itself. When copies of two double-page spreads of the tepee camp were placed side-by-side and then curved slightly, the students were quite struck when they realized that they were viewing what appeared to be one half of the Blackfeet tepee camp circle.

What did their responses to this story and to these illustrations suggest? The insights revealed during their discussions focused on expressiveness. The students seemed to look at the story and the illustrations for the quality of the experience they produced. In other words they thought that Goble's picture books (all of his stories and the illustrations he made for them) were of the highest quality because they offered new, intense, and interesting experiences and because he expressed his knowledge of, interest in, and fondness for these Native Americans in his stories and in his illustrations with enthusiasm and an intensity they admired. They seemed to be thoroughly fascinated and pleased with what they designated as Goble's creativity and originality, especially as far as his illustrations were concerned.

They were very impressed that he wrote and illustrated so many different stories about the Plains Indians--their folk tales and legends, as well as factual events. They were also impressed that he was so knowledgeable about

their traditions, beliefs, and history, considering, as one boy said, that "Mr. Goble wasn't a Native American and didn't even grow up or go to school in the United States when he was a child."

They laughed at the humor of Ikotomi's antics and predicaments depicted in Ikotomi and the Boulder (Goble, 1988), Ikotomi and the Berries (Coble, 1989), and Ikotomi and the Ducks (Goble, 1990). They participated enthusiastically and uninhibitedly when they engaged in readers' theater presentation of Ikotomi and the Berries which they had prepared. They seemed intrigued with, yet accepted without question, the relationship between the girl and the stallion in The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses and the portrayal of the love between parent and child depicted in Star Boy (Goble, 1983), a myth which explains how the sacred knowledge of the Sun Dance was given to the Blackfeet.

Some of the students made insightful comments and raised some important questions about the way Goble used form. For example, they commented on the similarities which they noticed in his books: his themes--often about people who turn into animals (one girl suggested that this theme emphasized how compatible and sympathetic these Native American people were with nature!)--his choice and use of media (which was water color paints), the manner in which he incorporated the traditional designs of the Sioux and the Blackfeet on the tepee and the characters' clothing, the stylized image of the horses, and the flora and fauna typical of the Plains. These similarities did not disturb them. Quite the contrary, for they indicated that such features only served to demonstrate not only how knowledgeable Goble was about the traditions of these Native Americans and where they lived but that he was very consistent in expressing this knowledge in his retellings of their stories.

Questions they raised and for which neither they nor I were able to find answers, were, "Why didn't Goble draw the frontal view of his characters'

faces?" "Why did he only show the faces from the side view or show just the back view of their heads?" The students went to considerable effort to point out that when frontal views of the characters were shown they were shown in silhouette and thus without any features and that every time a close-up of the front view of Ikotomi was shown his body was too big to fit on the page. Thus, once again they could not see his face because his body was cut off just below the shoulders or his neck.

During their discussions about Goble's writing and illustrating, the students did make evaluative statements which could be applied to some specific criteria or characteristics typically used to evaluate picture books as a specific kind of literature, the retellings of folk tales or legends, and literature in general. None of them indicated in any way that these judgments were guided by anything other than personal opinion. None indicated that they were able to distinguish yet between the literary appeal of the subject and the sentiment the story aroused (via text and/or illustrations) or even that what is achieved in each of his picture books is a work of literary art in itself. For example, as a group they tended to favor the Ikotomi stories because of the humorous predicaments that resulted from Ikotomi's mischievousness and naiveté, yet they liked all of Goble's picture books because they were about Native Americans, they told stories which they could easily understand and were interesting, and contained colorful pictures which depicted considerable action--in that order.

The students seemed quite willing to use a review to guide them in interpreting and evaluating a selection whether that review came from a peer they respected or admired or from an adult (their teacher, me, or a professional reviewer writing for a publication such as The Horn Book Magazine or the Bulletin for the Center of Children's Books, which I shared with them).

It appears that the students were just beginning to recognize that book reviewers are exercising aesthetic judgment in their reviews and, even though the reviewers may use the same criteria for evaluating picture books and these criteria have been established by tradition over many years, each reviewer interprets these criteria in his/her own terms.

Our goal in teaching the older students to respond critically/aesthetically to literature is to move them to the point where they are aware of some of the specific criteria or characteristics which have been established by tradition to interpret and evaluate varied kinds of literary selections. Using standards such as these, especially when interpreted flexibly, tends to help one respond to the aesthetics of literature with greater depth, meaning, and significance. We would hope that ultimately the students would feel no obligation to respond to them just as everyone else did. We would want them to recognize that diverse judgments about literature are bound to occur and should be respected. Because of the affective aspects of aesthetic response, as well as the amount and kinds of literature which a person has read in the past and his/her knowledge about literature as a subject in itself, these standards and characteristics are bound to be applied differently by each person.

Assessing Children's Responses to Literature

The success of a literature program is often based on the extent to which the students' enjoyment of literature is enhanced, but this kind of response (enjoyment) is an affective outcome that, to my knowledge, no written test can assess. This stance does not waive the need for some kind of evaluation or assessment of children's progress in learning about the aesthetic elements of literature. In fact, evaluation of children's aesthetic understandings and appreciation of literature as an art should be deemed an ongoing process that

is a part of each day's activities. In the main, children's progress in enjoying and learning about literature should be assessed by accurate observations and monitoring conducted consistently and continually in the full context of events pertaining to reading and responding to literature. Teachers should save whatever papers the students write in connection with their guided literature lessons, as well as any anecdotal records they make of their observations.

More specifically, the teachers are encouraged to assess students' progress by analyzing the brief anecdotal records of the students' informal responses to questions pertaining to their opinions about the literature they studied, their spontaneous comments about their expressions of interest in reading and literature, and whether or not the students seek further literary experiences. The students' knowledge of literary elements and techniques used in the literary selections they studied should also be assessed. The students' knowledge and understanding about specific aspects of the aesthetic elements of literature can also be assessed by considering their answers to questions which call for various kinds of thinking, ranging from literal to critical.

Conclusions

These kinds of responses by first graders, but especially by fifth graders, demonstrate that the acknowledgment of the cognitive element of response to literature does not deny the importance of the emotional side of the aesthetic experience; instead, the value of distinction is verified. Our cognition and our emotions are intrinsically related to aesthetic responses. The ways we understand a story (or a painting, a piece of sculpture, or a musical selection) influence our feelings and our feelings guide our understanding of it. To a large extent, cognition gives shape to emotions and for

this reason is a justified focus for analyzing and critiquing a literary work of art.

It is important to bear in mind that children in any of the elementary grades would respond most negatively to the reading of literature in general and to the study of literature in particular unless they are allowed to enjoy and respond to this literature, first-and-foremost, for the pleasure and enjoyment it offers, without having to focus on any curricular objective and without analyzing or critiquing it. There is no way we can teach children to engage in higher order thinking, especially critical thinking about literature, if we as teachers do not engage in this kind of thinking, too. This means that teachers must know the technique of critical thinking, they must be knowledgeable about literature as an art, they must be critical readers of literature, and must know and understand how to guide children in learning to be critical readers of literature as an art.

Most of us recognize that we cannot transform all of our students, or even a healthy percentage of our students, into professional literary critics. What we can do, more realistically perhaps, is to provide each and every one of our students with pleasant and satisfying experiences with and about literature so they will learn to prefer to read and think about fine literature. What we must create in our students and ourselves is a fine balance between emotion and intellect, where each is informed by the other, for every human being has the potential to develop aesthetic sensitivity to and preference for what is beautiful.

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